

Quality Education Directly Affects Economic Growth

Education is the centerpiece in the development of our mind, character or physical ability. A high-quality education is critical for our children's future and to America succeeding in an increasingly global marketplace. More and more, job growth and job creation are going to be tied to education.

As a Member of the Education and Labor Committee, I have the opportunity to address important issues like early learning, the rising cost of college and the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

One thing that I learned well as a Mayor was that more federal regulation does not always equal better education. The best educational system is one in which parents, teachers and local school boards collaborate and set the agenda - not bureaucrats in Washington. Whatever federal policy is put in place should encourage innovation from the bottom up, but too often the NCLB law has resulted in heavy-handed top-down regulation that has stifled innovation, frustrated teachers and confused parents. As we consider the reauthorization this year on NCLB, it is clear there are several things that must change in the law.

I believe NCLB met the stated goal of highlighting achievement gaps, even in suburban and rural schools that are considered quality places to receive an education. However, the law's requirement that all schools meet certain standards are faced with severe punishments that are not realistic and are demoralizing our educators in public education.

In advance of our committee's consideration of NCLB, I have conducted educational forums where I heard from educators, administrators and parents on how to improve this legislation. It is important to me to seek feedback and insight from those with the most knowledge and experience to ultimately strengthen programs like NCLB. Hundreds of educators showed up to these forums in both Johnson City and Morristown and gave me excellent feedback to help shape that effort.

During this reauthorization of NCLB, it is imperative we improve this legislation and ensure our educators and students are receiving the help they need in order to be successful.

I believe there is a direct correlation between the strength of our economy and the education that we provide to our young people. The better quality of education we can provide our children, the more opportunities they are afforded in life, and the higher chance they will be able to acquire a job. Economic research has found links between higher levels of cognitive skill—defined as “the performance of students on tests in math and science”—and economic growth. Specifically, Eric Hanushek, Dean Jamison, Eliot Jamison, and Ludger Woessmann write in the Spring 2008 issue of Education Next that countries with higher test scores experience far higher growth rates. In their research, they have found that a highly skilled workforce can raise economic growth by about two thirds of a percentage point every year.

If we create a better education system, I believe we will solve problems like health care and energy because people will

simply be able to make the right choices for themselves. I believe that the key to improving our economy in the long run is making sure our children are receiving the quality education they need and deserve.

Last year, President Obama and Congressional Democrats promised that borrowing another trillion dollars would create jobs "immediately" and unemployment would not rise above 8 percent. We all know this was not the case, and many are struggling with the record high unemployment levels. Not only did the "stimulus" bill fail to create jobs, but it added a record \$3.52 trillion and the national deficit hit a record \$1.4 trillion.

Despite the President's best efforts to "spend our way out of this recession," the American people know that we can't borrow and spend our way back to growth and prosperity.

For the health of our economy in the immediate future, we need to invest in infrastructure and focus on providing tax relief for working families and small businesses. But the future is upon us and now is the time to improve legislation like NCLB to ensure our children receive quality education, proven to provide a better quality of life, which will directly improve our future economic strength.